

# AMATEURADIO

News of the Amateur Radio  
and Amateur Satellite Services

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## Radio Hams Are 'Eyes' For Storm Watch

VISALIA, Calif. — When Amateur Radio operator Scott Thompson sees storm clouds rumbling in, he no longer simply runs for an umbrella. He sets out the rain gauge, checks the temperature and heads for his radio transmitter.

Thompson, emergency service coordinator in Tulare County for the American Radio Relay League, is a member of a newly-formed network of Amateur Radio operators working with the National Weather Service in California to help create an accurate picture of weather patterns in the state.

"A month or so ago when we had really bad thunderstorms it actually snowed near Los Banos," Thompson said. "We relayed that into the weather service — we try to let them know about anything unusual — and they added it to their travelers' advisory. The snow didn't stick, but cars were slipping around while it was falling so it was important that people knew about it."

He is one of 39 amateur operators in the San Joaquin Valley who joined the volunteer network, SKYWARN, when it was organized last fall. Twelve team members, including the emergency coordinator for the valley, are based in Fresno County.

Mike Mogil, the U.S. Weather Service meteorologist

who started and currently heads the program in California, says forecasters have several times changed their weather advisories based on information from the radio operators.

"For instance, during the winter we would project snow near the 4,000-foot line and operators would call in and say it was snowing where they were located at the 3,000-foot level," he said. "With that we could adjust our advisory and notify the highway patrol of the change. We only have about five lookout posts in the Sierra, so this network can really fill in the gaps for us."

The cooperative program between amateur operators and the National Weather Service began several years ago in the Midwest as a way to improve the tornado warning system in that part of the country.

"Our radio and satellite photos can pick up a storm system, but can't identify clouds as potential starters for tornadoes," Mogil said. "So having radio operators as lookouts is a very practical idea. The best thing for watching tornadoes is the human eye."

Mogil organized the state's SKYWARN program last summer after being transferred to the coastal community of Redwood City from Washington, D.C.

*(Continued next page)*



"I thought, well, we don't have the same severe weather problems here," he said. "But why couldn't we use a radio operator network to deal with other weather problems? I figured if it worked well somewhere else, it could work well here."

He contacted a director of the American Radio Relay League, membership organization of more than 150,000 radio amateurs in the U.S. and Canada, and found himself almost overwhelmed with offers of help.

"Amateur Radio operators have a tradition of public services," said Mogil. "I called one person and the program almost formed itself. We now have 200 people in the network, along the coast, in northern California and in the San Joaquin Valley. And I've been asked to hold a training session in Bakersfield, about 150 miles north of

Los Angeles, to introduce another 30 operators to the program."

Meanwhile, Mogil has been holding a series of weather observation workshops for the radio operators, teaching them to use rain gauges and recognize storm patterns.

"We can give them a much better idea of how much rain is coming in," added radio operator Thompson. "For instance, here in Visalia the official observation post is at the airport. It could rain buckets here and only drizzle there. Before the network, the weather service might be reporting light rain and I might be knee-deep in water. We can help everyone get more accurate information."

— Deborah Blum, *The Fresno (CA) Bee*

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*Ham operator Scott Thompson monitors weather conditions from his home in Visalia, Calif., as part of SKYWARN program.*

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## Amateur Satellite To Be Launched Next Month

With construction finished and pre-flight testing nearly completed, all systems point to a "GO" for Britain's first Amateur Radio satellite scheduled for launch next month, radio amateurs readying the spacecraft at the University of Surrey, England, recently announced.

According to Dr. Martin Sweeting, project manager for the University of Surrey Amateur Satellite program (UoSAT), the experimental satellite will be launched September 15 aboard a NASA Delta rocket from Vandenberg AFB in California.

The satellite, which will be called AMSAT-OSCAR 9 when in orbit, is a joint project of UoSAT and the Amateur Radio Satellite Corporation (AMSAT) in Washington, D.C.

Unlike the previous eight OSCAR spacecrafts, which

were designed primarily for long-range communications, this latest satellite will be strictly experimental.

While in orbit, about 300 miles above the earth, OSCAR 9 will be used by Amateur Radio operators to study the various ways radio signals travel in the earth's atmosphere and the suitability of new frequencies for use in future satellites, UoSAT officials said.

Amateurs at UoSAT will also receive pictures sent back from an amateur slow-scan television camera mounted on the satellite. These images, while providing weather information, will also be used in schools to augment classroom science programs.

The OSCAR (Orbiting Satellite Carrying Amateur Radio) series began in 1961 with the launch of OSCAR 1, the world's first non-governmental satellite.



# PROFILE

## Joe Rudi — Professional Athlete With An Amateur Side

Professional baseball player Joe Rudi, formerly with the world champion Oakland A's and the California Angels, and now with the Boston Red Sox, came to Newington, Conn., on a day off late last May. But it wasn't to talk baseball — or the threat of no-baseball. He came to the American Radio Relay League, headquarters for more than 150,000 ham operators, to talk radio — Amateur Radio, a hobby of his for the past seven years. While in town, Rudi talked with Carol Colvin, editorial assistant for ARRL's *QST* magazine, and Andrew Tripp, editor of *AmateurRadio*, about the amateur side of his life.

**Baseball seems so far-removed from the world of electronics and radio communications. How, then, did you happen to get involved with Amateur Radio?**

As a boy, I never really had much interest or training in electronics, except maybe building a crystal set when I was in the Boy Scouts. But about seven years ago, when I moved next to a Franciscan Brothers retreat house, I got to be good friends with one of the brothers and a handyman there who were ham radio operators. Some evenings I would go over and watch them operate in their ham "shack." When I saw the radios they had and how they were talking with people all over the world, I became interested in the hobby and in becoming a ham operator myself. They got me started, and I've been hooked on the hobby ever since.

**Is there any one thing about the Amateur Radio hobby that particularly appeals to you?**

Just meeting and enjoying people on the air. I've met so many people who have become close friends just by getting on the radio. You start talking with a total stranger, and before you know it you've become the best of friends. Most people have a shield around them that they never let down to where it's just two people talking. But not so on the air. Ham radio opens the door and gets people to let their hair down. You can go anywhere in the world by radio and find people you can easily relate to. That's why I like to see kids getting into the hobby. I think ham radio can play an important part in their personal growth and development.

**Ham radio seems to be a form of relaxation for you — a means of temporarily escaping the pressures of your unique profession — as well as a source of enjoyment. Has it helped you in that way?**

Amateur Radio has been tremendously helpful in that area. In my first years playing ball, particularly on road

trips when I was away from home for days, sometimes weeks, at a time, I would go back to my hotel room after a game and read, watch television or end up in a bar with some of my teammates talking baseball. So it was a god-send for me to get into Amateur Radio. I was like a kid with a new toy; I couldn't wait to get back to the room and operate my radio. It's a great feeling being able to get away from the hubbub and talk with someone, somewhere in the world, on a one-to-one basis, without being Joe Rudi the baseball player.

**Then you take your equipment on the road with you?**

Most of the players carry one suitcase when they travel. I carry two, and one of them is filled with about 80 pounds of radio equipment. Radio gear is pretty compact nowadays, so what I take with me fits in one suitcase. I have to laugh, though, when I think of the look on porters' faces when they pick up my bags.

**Some say the Morse code is too hard for the average person to learn, that it prevents people from passing the Novice test and getting a license. How was it for you?**



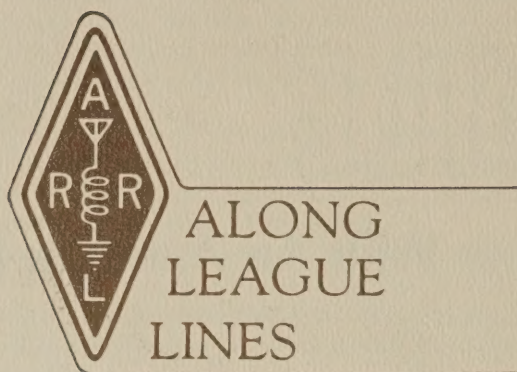
I can't say the code was easy or hard. For me, it was just plain work. I'd get up half an hour early every morning to practice the code. At night I'd try to practice some more. It takes perseverance to learn the code. You can read the theory over a few times and learn it, or memorize it to pass the test. But the code is the hump you have to get over, and a lot of people don't want to make that sacrifice. That's why the code is

so important. It pulls out the people who aren't really interested in Amateur Radio.

**Presently before Congress are two bills that propose the use of volunteer amateurs to monitor the airwaves, a kind of self-policing action that most in the amateur community seem to back. What are your thoughts on this?**

I would like to see the use of hams to help the FCC police the amateur bands. Everyone knows there aren't enough FCC people around to do the job. One of the reasons hams have kept the bands they have is that they've always been able to take care of their own. Yes, I'd like to see more hams taking part in finding jammers and people who are operating illegally or using foul language, and helping get them off the air. If that's the only reason they're (violators) on the air, they shouldn't be there. That kind of behavior is alien to what Amateur Radio is all about.





This past June we reported the American Radio Relay League's reaction to U.S. Attorney Atlee W. Wampler's surprise decision to drop charges against a Miami man accused of illegally using the amateur bands to broadcast anti-Castro propaganda to Cuba. In that report, ARRL President Harry J. Dannals blasted Mr. Wampler for not enforcing the law and for failing to protect the rights of U.S. citizens, in this case radio amateurs, to be free from interference from illegal broadcasters.

At that time, Mr. Wampler said the charges were dropped after the defendant agreed to halt his broadcast activities, and not for political reasons, as some FCC officials in Florida had charged.

More recently, in a letter to Dannals, Mr. Wampler answered ARRL's charges by outlining his reasons for not prosecuting the alleged pirate broadcaster. The U.S. Attorney's explanation, although it helped clarify the

government's position, offered little assurance that justice was served in this case.

According to Mr. Wampler, his decision to terminate the case was "the result of the personal review by me of national security documents (which ultimately would be made public), discussions with persons in a large number of agencies responsible for our national security and pragmatic litigation decisions." Further, said Mr. Wampler, "the likelihood of obtaining a conviction was minimal." Wherein the government struck its deal with the defendant: no prosecution for no more broadcasts.

Mr. Wampler has had access to national security files, which he says affected his decision in this case; we have not. Still, we fail to see how broadcasts that have been heard by thousands of others could pose a threat to the "national security" of this country.

Moreover, the government missed a golden opportunity to make an example of an individual who has all but admitted publicly to willful and deliberate violations of the law. In fact, the defendant in this case was out on bail and awaiting trial when the FCC tracked and shut down his operation for the second time since 1979.

For years, illegal broadcasts on amateur bands have been a problem and a source of severe interference, particularly in the Miami area. The government's dropping of this case, which FCC officials say was their strongest ever against a pirate broadcaster, can only help encourage further illegal activity on the airwaves.

As it is, the amateur community is left with a very undesirable situation in southern Florida, one which is ever so far from being resolved.



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